

California City residents now cooking with gas

The Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, July 23, 2020

As many as 224 California City residents will receive natural gas service under a state-guided environmental initiative launched Thursday.

Southern California Gas Co. said it began installing meters, heaters and gas-powered appliances in the homes of city residents who until now have had to rely on propane and wood.

The demonstration project approved in 2018 by the California Public Utilities Commission is among 11 designed to save people money on energy while also reducing air pollution and greenhouse-gas emissions.

"This program will provide dozens of families with more affordable, reliable energy for the long term," Jeff Walker, vice president of customer solutions for SoCalGas, said in a news release.

Participating residents will be given access to energy efficiency and bill assistance programs, as well as online bill-paying options.

SoCalGas said about half of them will also receive solar thermal units that work with water heaters to save energy and money.

California City residents interested in applying to take part in the program can do so online at <https://www.socalgas.com/save-money-and-energy/assistance-programs/california-city-project>.

The Bakersfield Californian Community Voices, Friday, July 24, 2020

Biking brings Bakersfield many benefits

By Glenn Hammett

One of the unexpected positives to emerge from the coronavirus pandemic is the explosion of bicycling as a means of transportation, relaxation and improving physical and mental health.

Not only are bike sales up (65 percent over last year according to PeopleForBikes, a national bicycle advocacy group based in Boulder, Colo.), but service requests are off the charts. At local bike shops, like those across the country, what was once a one or two day wait for a simple repair or tune-up is now three or four weeks. People are rehabilitating those bikes that have been hanging idle in their garages and riding them to work, getting exercise and enjoying safe and healthy family outings.

Since the middle of March, when the seriousness of the pandemic became apparent, Americans, in droves, have turned to bikes as an alternative to crowded public transportation systems, canceled youth and recreational sports and closed or restricted gyms, as well as a welcome and safe escape from shelter-in-place orders.

Our community is extremely fortunate that, nearly 50 years ago, Bill Cooper and Rich O'Neil had the vision and determination to advocate for the creation of the Kern River Parkway, which now includes 32 miles of class 1 bike paths (paved and separated from streets), dirt trails and more than 15 parks, preserves and designated open spaces extending from Lake Ming to Enos Lane. The corridor serves as a playground for cyclists, equestrians, pedestrians, joggers and skaters.

We are also fortunate that local bicycle advocates and receptive city and county leaders have worked together over the last couple of decades to create a robust network of bike lanes and routes throughout the city. Though there is more that could be done in this area, the result is that Bakersfield has developed a solid bicycle infrastructure. City and county leaders are continually securing funding and updating plans to improve and add to the network of low-stress pathways, including extending the trail to Buena Vista Lake and enhancing the bike facilities around Hart Park and Lake Ming.

With the current coronavirus-fueled bicycle boon, the investments our area has made in these projects over the years appears to be paying off. Bikes would not be flying off the shelves and out of repair shops if people did not have safe places to ride.

The benefits of more people riding bikes and less people driving cars are numerous and well-documented: Lower incidences of obesity, heart disease and diabetes; better mental health; better air quality; less traffic congestion; even economic prosperity — areas in which Bakersfield typically does not score well in national and statewide studies.

So, this trend is one we should all be hoping will continue, even after the pandemic is resolved, because our community is healthier, happier and cleaner when more of us choose to pedal rather than drive. We should support efforts to improve bike and pedestrian infrastructure. Motorists should treat bicyclists as equals on the road, and cyclists should obey traffic laws as if they were driving a car.

And, if you haven't ridden your bike in a while, you should dust it off, put some air in the tires and give it a try. You and your community will be better for it.